

## Men, Women, and Cranes: Gender and the Epiphanic Gaze

Tragic practitioners invented the crane (*mêchanê*), thereby creating an even more powerful position of observation and control on the Attic stage than that provided by the *theologeion*. The essential study of Mastronarde (1990) notes scholars' tendency to minimize its presence in reconstructing staging, admitting its use only where undeniable evidence testifies to its presence and striving to defend Aeschylus and above all Sophocles from having "stooped" to its use. Its use in tragedy, however, and the response of comedy trace a lively performative dialogue through several generations of dramatists concerning who could and should control the epiphanic gaze.

Although its earliest certain employment allowed the title character of *Medea* to take wing, the large majority of tragic uses of the crane empowered the gods' intervention in the course or at the end of the plot, with the epiphanic divinities including both male and female. Comedy's parodic appropriation of the crane primarily uses abject male mortals to challenge divine order and control. In Aristophanes' *Peace*, the character of Trygaeus reworks both Aesop and Euripides' Bellerephon in his ascent to heaven to overthrow the gods' continuation of the war. The fragments of Aristophanes' *Daedalus* and *Gerytades* suggest similar uses of the *mêchanê* by male comic protagonists, as do fragmentary attestations from Strattis (see Orth 2009 and Telò 2013) and Eubulus, as well as possibly Cratinus's *Seriphoi* (Bakola 2010, Storey 2011). The sole exception, Iris in *Birds*, both female and divine, is subjected to extreme threats of violence and rape. While *Birds* represents the boldest comic attempt to invert the hierarchy of the universe (Arrowsmith 1973, Konstan 1995), this alone does not explain the depth of Old Comedy's resistance to the epiphanic gaze and in particular to female divinities. While very faint traces in 4<sup>th</sup>-century mythological burlesque may suggest that Middle Comedy eventually made

use of parodic versions of *deae ex machina*, the hyperbolically masculine persona of the Old Comedy protagonist resisted any limitation on his ambitions.

[PowerPoint projection is requested for both text and illustrations of staging reconstruction.]

### Bibliography

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